CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

LAW AND BUSINESS

NATIONAL SECURITY

POPULATION AND AGING

PUBLIC SAFETY

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY

Support RAND

Purchase this document

Browse Reports & Bookstore

Make a charitable contribution

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore the RAND Corporation

View document details

		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188
Report Documentation Page		

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **2013**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2013 to 00-00-2013**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali: Approaches to Engaging Local Actors**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **RAND Corporation,National Defense Research Institute,1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138,Santa Monica,CA,90407-2138**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release; distribution unlimited**		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT		
15. SUBJECT TERMS		

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT **Same as Report (SAR)**	18. NUMBER OF PAGES **14**	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**			

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

This report is part of the RAND Corporation research report series. RAND reports present research findings and objective analysis that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors. All RAND reports undergo rigorous peer review to ensure high standards for research quality and objectivity.

Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali

Approaches to Engaging Local Actors

Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin

Key findings

- Any solution to the crisis in northern Mali needs to take into account the complexity of the root causes—including economic, religious, and political factors—that led to the conflict in the first place.

- Uprisings in the region are almost always the work of a few specific clans or tribes acting in pursuit of specific objectives, rather than entire communities or ethnic groups rebelling with a common cause.

- The Malian government and the international community will have to delegate some amount of security responsibility to northerners.

- Several examples from Mali's past provide cautions and suggestions on how to engage local actors today.

Although Mali has been a major recipient of U.S. military and development programs for almost a decade, in 2012, a known Al Qa'ida affiliate, Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and largely indigenous Islamist allies, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), successfully took advantage of Mali's political instability and military weakness to amass power.[1] Mali's vaunted democracy, moreover, collapsed in a military coup, while on the northern battlefields, the Malian Army's performance was disastrous. In other words, all the past assumptions about Mali's political stability, internal cohesion, and military capabilities were revealed to be deeply flawed.

U.S. policymakers' worries turned to some degree into relief when, in January 2013, France intervened to halt the Islamist groups' offensive into southern Mali and soon expelled them from the three major northern cities they had controlled for almost a year. The relief, however, is premature. The French, and the African forces that joined them, appear to have scattered the militants more than defeated them, and the coalition has not secured the entire territory beyond the larger towns. France, moreover, has not addressed any of the conditions and drivers that brought about the crisis in the first place, nor does it appear to be working toward putting in place viable political and security arrangements that are necessary to ensure that the benefits of its intervention survive the withdrawal of French troops. In other words, the situation risks reverting to the status quo ante, and the threat once represented by northern Mali's Islamist militants is all but certain to return unless there are significant changes to the current intervention in Mali.

After a decade of costly wars and drawn-out nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, Western powers are understandably leery of long-term engagements, particularly in countries that do not rank high on the list of strategic priorities. Given that the United States plans to shift its attention and military resources away from Africa and the Middle East as part of its "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region, its engagement in

the Sahel will likely remain limited to the "small footprint" approach it has taken for the past decade, during which it has deployed small Special Forces teams to train counterterrorism forces and provided other small-scale packages of both military and nonmilitary aid. France, for its part, is uninterested in launching a long-term military occupation and nation-building effort, both because of its domestic economic situation and because it does not want to be seen as a neo-colonialist power by the Malian population. This raises the question of how France, the United States, and the rest of the international community can ensure that northern Mali remains tolerably stable and secure while minimizing the level of international presence required in the region.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING LOCAL DYNAMICS AND ACTORS

There are two key answers to this question. First, it is critical to understand the drivers of militancy in order to address them—whether through aid, security force assistance, or "friendly pressure" on the leadership in Bamako, Mali's capital. Although many observers have cited the influx of weapons and combatants from Libya following the fall of the Qaddafi regime as a driver of the January 2012 rebellion, this development merely served as a catalyst for local residents to act upon the discontent that had been brewing for decades and that had already prompted three rebellions. Responding to or at least taking into consideration the root causes of discontent—economic distress, the poor results of decentralization, religious ferment, and inter- and intra-communal competition—are essential for preventing another crisis.

Second, in the absence of a large international presence, durable security in the north will have to be provided, to a large extent, by local actors. Specifically, the Malian government and the international community would have to delegate some amount of security responsibility to northerners. Only the northerners, who have an unparalleled knowledge of the region and its inhabitants and who are uniquely placed to prevent the reemergence of militancy, can provide, over the long term, the degree of stability and security the international community seeks. To work effectively with the northerners, however, France, the United States, and other interested parties need a precise knowledge of pertinent actors and their interests to limit

Security in the north will have to be provided, to a large extent, by local actors.

the risk of negative unintended consequences, such as the confiscation of security provision by one community or another.

In working with local parties, Western actors must avoid the danger posed by engaging actors without understanding the associated risks, as a January 2013 *New York Times* article claimed the United States had done in Mali by training Tuareg-led units that ended up defecting to the rebellion.[2] Several historical examples, ranging from colonial France to modern-day Mali, show how such knowledge of local dynamics has been used in the past to establish some degree of stability in the north, and these examples offer some suggestions as to how it can be done better today. Although the context has markedly changed, a detailed understanding of the local environment in northern Mali is still necessary for finding short-, medium-, and long-term security solutions for the region, particularly if one wishes to keep the total cost and numbers of international "boots on the ground" to a minimum.

This report is intended to assist with the next steps—the post-conflict planning—that are necessary for establishing in

REUTERS

Tuareg Malian soldiers patrol a street in Gao on February 11, 2013. Islamist insurgents held the town for about ten months before the French-led intervention in January.

northern Mali the political dispensation and security arrangements without which France's intervention will be in vain. The first section provides a brief introduction to Mali's population and gives some background on the different groups who have been involved—as combatants and noncombatants—in the crisis. The second provides an overview of some of the drivers of the conflict in northern Mali, including certain aspects of local politics that are likely to continue shaping the political landscape for the foreseeable future. These, if taken into consideration, can inform outside engagement so as to help prevent well-intentioned outsiders from making matters worse, reveal opportunities for engagement, and generally optimize efforts, to ensure the best results possible for what will most likely be a minimal investment. The third part draws on historical examples that demonstrate the feasibility and limitations of constructive engagement, and it uses them as a point of departure for a broader discussion of what constructive engagement in northern Mali might look like.

A DIVERSE AND DIVIDED POPULATION

Mali's division between north and south is best understood as a porous boundary between two climates (desert in the north and subtropical in the south, with the Sahelian belt in the middle) and two broad patterns of populations. In the south, where roughly 90 percent of Mali's 15.5 million inhabitants live, one finds a number of ethnic communities dominated by the Bambaras, who also dominate Mali's government and military and who ruled southern Mali for much of the past few centuries. North of the boundary, two bands exist. The first is the ethnically diverse region of the Niger River bend. It includes Timbuktu and Gao as well as numerous farming and fishing communities populated by an array of settled and semi-nomadic ethnic groups—most prominently the Songhays and Peuls. North of the Niger River is, essentially, the desert. Arabs and Tuaregs straddle both bands.
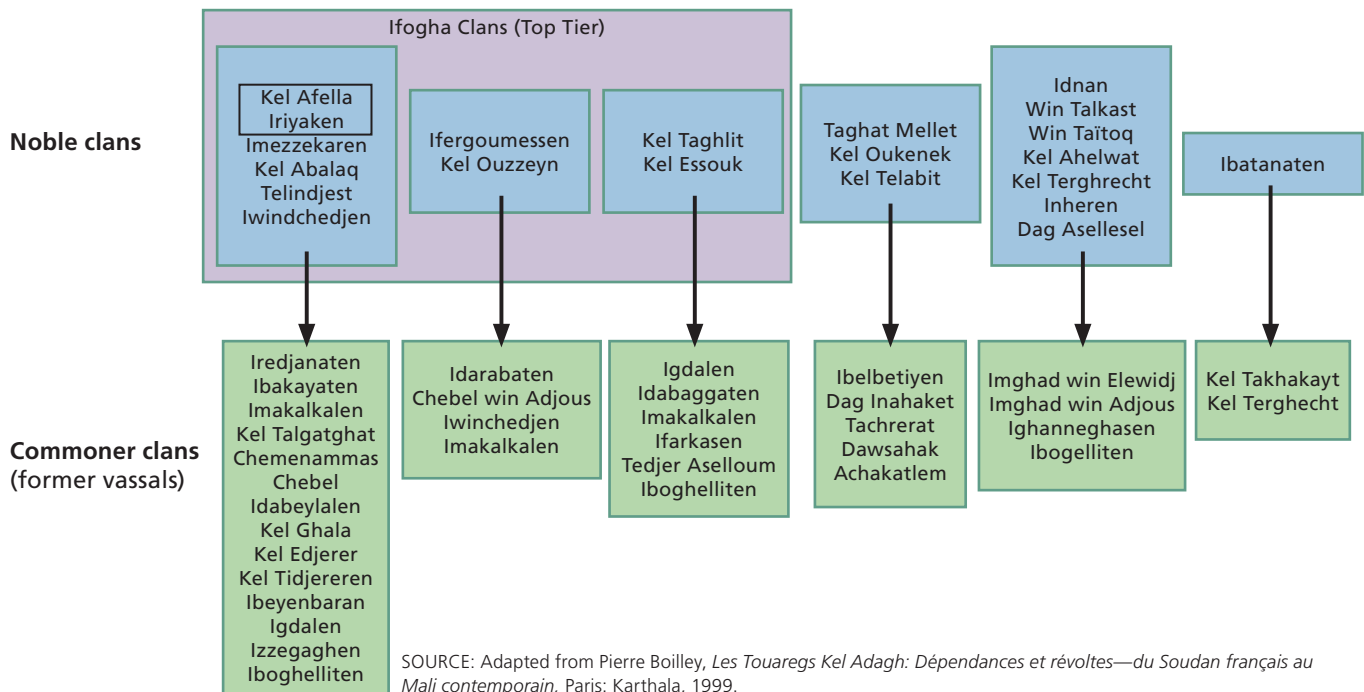
There are no reliable data available indicating the breakdown of northern Mali's population among its different ethnic groups. Each group, moreover, is further divided internally. Tuaregs have historically organized themselves into confederations divided by caste and clan and both horizontal and vertical hierarchies. In brief, each confederation consists of numerous

clusters of noble clans, with each cluster associated with clusters of subordinate clans as well as artisan clans and former slave clans. At the top of the system is a (usually elected) chief known as an *amenokal*. Some noble clans and amenokals have derived their legitimacy historically from their warrior status—they protected vassals—while others combined warrior status with prestige associated with Islamic credentials and pretensions to descent from Islamic notables close to the Prophet Mohammed. The dominant Tuareg confederation since the beginning of the 20th century has been the Kel Adagh confederation, and the dominant noble clans within that confederation are known as Ifoghas (alternatively, Afaghis), who are among those who derive much of their noble status and political legitimacy from their claims to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammed (see figure on next page).

There are similar divisions among Mali's Arab communities, which historically have had their own confederations, complete with noble and vassal tribes, warrior elites, and religious elites. The two major Arab confederations are the Berabiche and the Kuntas. The Kuntas, though smaller in number than the Berabiche, traditionally have been pillars of the Sufi Islam generally associated with the region. Mali's Songhay communities have a more horizontal organization: They are organized by villages in which elders elect village chiefs.[3] In contrast, Peul society traditionally has been at least as stratified as Tuareg society.

The Structure and Hierarchies of the Kel Adagh Confederation

Arrows refer to traditional relationships of dependence between noble and commoner clans. The elite noble clans at the top of the hierarchy are known collective as Ifogha. The traditional leader of the Kel Adagh, the amenokal, is Kel Afella, while Iyad ag Ghali, the commander of Ansar Dine, is Iriyaken.

Ifogha Clans (Top Tier)

Noble clans

| Kel Afella Iriyaken Imezzekaren Kel Abalaq Telindjest Iwindchedjen | Ifergoumessen Kel Ouzzeyn | Kel Taghlit Kel Essouk | Taghat Mellet Kel Oukenek Kel Telabit | Idnan Win Talkast Win Taïtoq Kel Ahelwat Kel Terghrecht Inheren Dag Asellesel | Ibatanaten |

Commoner clans (former vassals)

| Iredjanaten Ibakayaten Imakalkalen Kel Talgatghat Chemenammas Chebel Idabeylalen Kel Ghala Kel Edjerer Kel Tidjereren Ibeyenbaran Igdalen Izzegaghen Iboghelliten | Idarabaten Chebel win Adjous Iwinchedjen Imakalkalen | Igdalen Idabaggaten Imakalkalen Ifarkasen Tedjer Aselloum Iboghelliten | Ibelbetiyen Dag Inahaket Tachrerat Dawsahak Achakatlem | Imghad win Elewidj Imghad win Adjous Ighanneghasen Ibogelliten | Kel Takhakayt Kel Terghecht |

SOURCE: Adapted from Pierre Boilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh: Dépendances et révoltes—du Soudan français au Mali contemporain,* Paris: Karthala, 1999.

Race and Islam play significant roles in discourses of power in northern Mali. All northern Malians and almost all southern Malians are Muslim, although many of the southerners only converted in the 19th century as a result of jihads launched from without.[4] Arabs and Tuaregs, generally speaking, consider themselves to be "white" or at least not "black," whereas the other communities—the Songhay, Peuls, and several others, including the Mandés and Bambaras who predominate in the south and make up the bulk of Mali's overall population— regard themselves as "black." Racial identities are based less on skin color than on ethnic and religious credentials rooted in legends describing descent from the Prophet himself or Arabs close to the Prophet.[5]

It is important to note that intra- and inter-community hierarchies are not fixed. On the contrary, they are contested and disputed; identities are fluid. As a result, inter- and intra-communal competition in northern Mali often leads to conflict. Contrary to outsiders' perceptions that conflict in the region is driven by tensions between broadly defined ethnic groups—such as Tuaregs or Arabs—perhaps the most striking detail that emerges from an examination of conflicts in Mali is that it is rarely, if ever, the case that entire communities rebel as a whole. Uprisings are almost always the work of a few specific clans or tribes acting in pursuit of specific objectives, which tend to have a great deal to do with their positions relative to other clans and tribes.[6] Especially within communities, elites struggle to retain their advantage, while traditionally subordinate groups attempt to raise their status. Even in the 1990 rebellion, in which a broad coalition of militant groups associated with many of northern Mali's "white" communities rose up against Bamako, the conflict quickly devolved into a general melee pitting clan against clan, caste against caste, and—most devastatingly—"white" against "black." More specifically, the worst violence of the 1990s by far was the result of attacks by Malian Army–sponsored Songhay militias (known as the Ganda Koy) against Arab and Tuareg civilian populations, and Arab and Tuareg militias' reprisal attacks against Songhay civilians. This episode and its still-vivid memory contributed to strengthening racial divisions in northern Mali.

This brief introduction on the populations of southern and northern Mali is a necessary background to understand the different drivers of conflict that have led to the current crisis, which are described in the next section.

DRIVERS OF CONFLICT IN NORTHERN MALI

France's intervention has achieved most of its probable objectives. Namely, it stopped the offensive toward Bamako launched by the Islamist militant groups that seized control of northern Mali in 2012. It also managed to scatter their forces and destroy some of their military capacity. And yet, without wishing to diminish the French military's accomplishments, not to mention those of its Chadian and other allies, there still remains much to be done. France so far has not defeated the militants, nor has it secured areas outside of northern Mali's larger towns, as was demonstrated in February 2013 when militants slipped back into Gao and engaged French and Malian troops there and committed terrorist attacks in several northern towns. Perhaps more significantly, France does not appear to have initiated efforts to secure its gains after French troops withdraw, beyond planning to hand off as much responsibility as possible to incoming African troops or a UN force, and neither France nor its allies—foremost among them the Malian government—have done anything to address the factors that produced Mali's crisis: economic distress, poor decentralization, democratic reversals, religious ferment, and inter- and intra-communal competition.

Economic distress must always be kept in mind when considering northern Mali's problems. Northern Mali has always been an exceptionally difficult place to live, and its inhabitants live with the thinnest of safety margins. The German anthropologist Georg Klute was not indulging in hyperbole when he declared the daily life of Tuareg nomads as, "the hardest job in the world."[7] A combination of factors, including some catastrophic droughts and harmful state policies, have pushed the population in recent decades into a state of nearly perpetual crisis, alleviated only by the venting of northern populations by means of internal migration or external exile.[8] In this context, any and all sources of revenue, including international aid, become objects of intense competition, and the money resulting from the drug trade, which has emerged into the public view only in the past decade, greatly undermines local governance and corrodes traditional solidarities. This last element has been a game changer of sorts to local power structures by injecting large amounts of cash in a region that is particularly sensitive to even minor capital inflows and by offering attractive opportunities for youth in a land with few, if any, alternative sources of incomes.
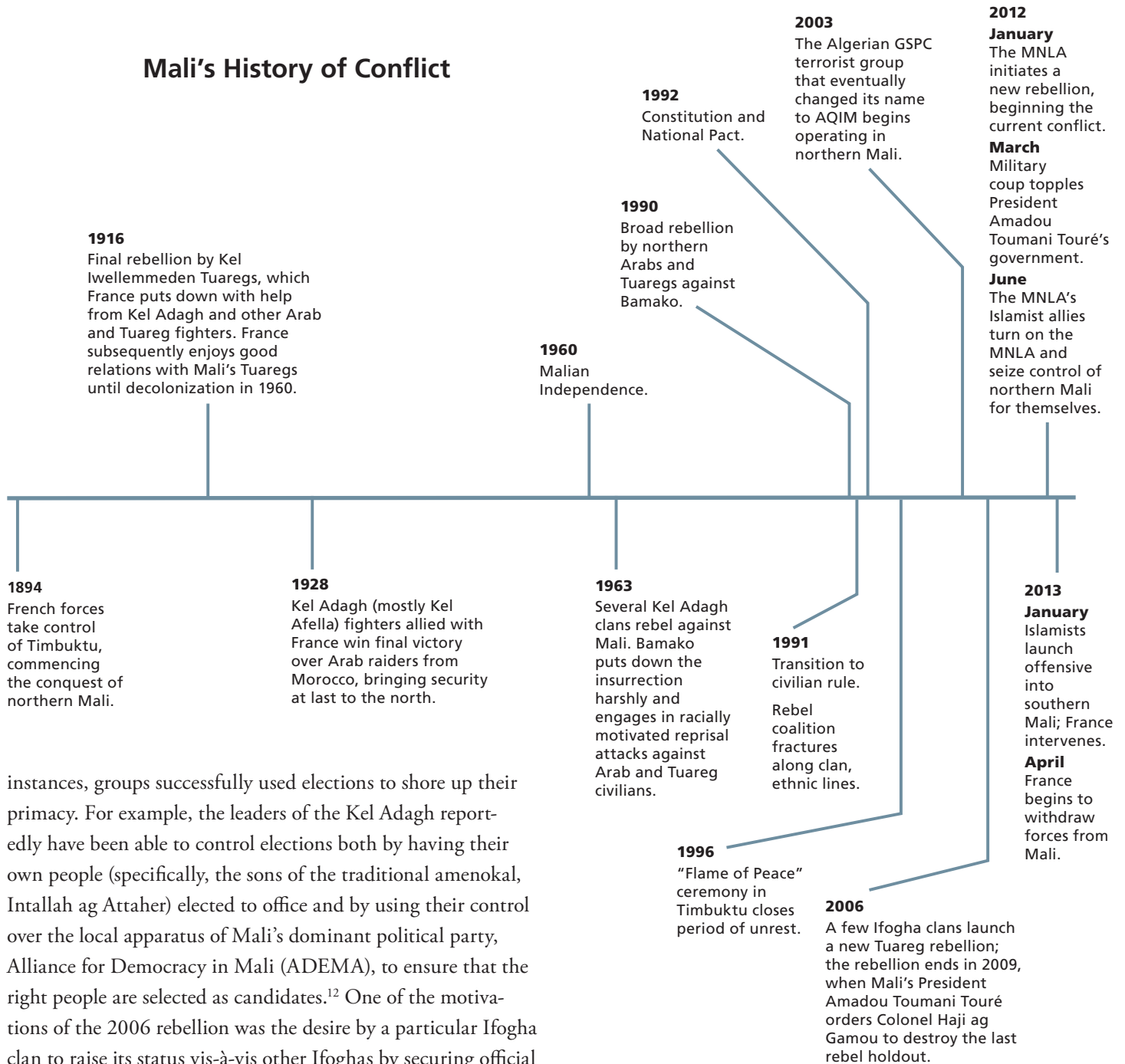
The north's precarious economic circumstances have been compounded by the Malian government, which has repeatedly broken promises to share a large portion of resources with the north and to bring more development to the region. Much of the aid that has been earmarked for the north has, in fact, never reached its destination because of corruption or plain bad faith. International aid from foreign governments or nongovernmental organizations has become not only a major source of income for the region but also a vehicle for individuals and groups to elevate their political and social status relative to others. It has given rise to a new class of political entrepreneurs reminiscent of the intermediaries between local communities and colonial administrations, referred to as "aid brokers." Individuals strive to monopolize their access to aid by winning the loyalty of aid providers, in many cases altering the political landscape as a result.[9]

The region's extreme poverty and its reliance, particularly in recent years, on external infusions of cash and resources explains why economic opportunism has driven many individuals to join whatever armed group offered a decent living or to switch sides when potential benefits seemed larger in another group.[10] Ansar Dine and MUJAO, for example, appear to have—at least initially—derived much of their strength from their wealth, which enabled them to provide young men with precious opportunities for gain and social advancement. MUJAO reportedly provided extensive financial support to its recruits' families, which probably acted as a strong incentive for individuals to join the group.[11] In contrast, the smaller resources of the secular Tuareg rebel group National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (known under its French acronym, MNLA) explain in part the decline of the group in the months that followed its takeover of northern towns in 2012.

The combined effects of flawed decentralization and democratization have been another important issue at the core of northern populations' grievances. Both were key mandates of the transition to civilian rule that began in 1991 and were enshrined in the 1992 Constitution and the 1992 National Pact signed between Bamako and some northern rebel groups. The idea was to improve governance and strengthen ties between local communities and the nation by creating multiple new levels of elected local and regional administrations.

The principle behind this program was sound, but in practice, decentralization and democratization—given poor capacity, scant resources, and corruption, not to mention the tendency of communal rivalries to spill over into electoral contests—arguably only complicated the situation. In some

Mali's History of Conflict

1916
Final rebellion by Kel Iwellemmeden Tuaregs, which France puts down with help from Kel Adagh and other Arab and Tuareg fighters. France subsequently enjoys good relations with Mali's Tuaregs until decolonization in 1960.

1960
Malian Independence.

1990
Broad rebellion by northern Arabs and Tuaregs against Bamako.

1992
Constitution and National Pact.

2003
The Algerian GSPC terrorist group that eventually changed its name to AQIM begins operating in northern Mali.

2012
January
The MNLA initiates a new rebellion, beginning the current conflict.
March
Military coup topples President Amadou Toumani Touré's government.
June
The MNLA's Islamist allies turn on the MNLA and seize control of northern Mali for themselves.

1894
French forces take control of Timbuktu, commencing the conquest of northern Mali.

1928
Kel Adagh (mostly Kel Afella) fighters allied with France win final victory over Arab raiders from Morocco, bringing security at last to the north.

1963
Several Kel Adagh clans rebel against Mali. Bamako puts down the insurrection harshly and engages in racially motivated reprisal attacks against Arab and Tuareg civilians.

1991
Transition to civilian rule.

Rebel coalition fractures along clan, ethnic lines.

1996
"Flame of Peace" ceremony in Timbuktu closes period of unrest.

2006
A few Ifogha clans launch a new Tuareg rebellion; the rebellion ends in 2009, when Mali's President Amadou Toumani Touré orders Colonel Haji ag Gamou to destroy the last rebel holdout.

2013
January
Islamists launch offensive into southern Mali; France intervenes.
April
France begins to withdraw forces from Mali.

instances, groups successfully used elections to shore up their primacy. For example, the leaders of the Kel Adagh reportedly have been able to control elections both by having their own people (specifically, the sons of the traditional amenokal, Intallah ag Attaher) elected to office and by using their control over the local apparatus of Mali's dominant political party, Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), to ensure that the right people are selected as candidates.[12] One of the motivations of the 2006 rebellion was the desire by a particular Ifogha clan to raise its status vis-à-vis other Ifoghas by securing official recognition for a new administrative zone that it would be able to control.

Religion has only become a complicating factor in recent years. Mali has long had a reputation for being a bastion of moderate, Sufi Islam. However, recent decades have witnessed both the Islamization of the public sphere in Mali as well as an upsurge in Islamist or "reformist" religious movements critical of traditional Sufi practices that affect many or even all of Mali's ethnic communities.[13] Though these "reformist" strains emphasize Islamic orthodoxy and condemn Sufi practices, most do not promote change through violence. Some of the

new charismatic clerics, for example, have opposed the Islamist militant groups that took power in the north. Others have gone in different directions. The most notable examples are several Songhay and Peul communities in the region of Gao who have embraced radical Islam and are reported to be supporters of MUJAO.[14] Indeed, the strong local support among some in Gao for MUJAO may explain the lingering insecurity there and the French military's need to refocus attention there after its February advance into the Adrar des Ifoghas.

Religious changes affect Mali's political order as well. Islam plays an important role in politics and in shaping political discourse, even though Mali's constitution affirms the state's secular character. A sure way to enhance one's status politically is by selectively highlighting certain credentials, including religious ones, whether by strengthening one's claims to genealogical ties to renowned Islamic leaders or through various forms of piety. Entire clans and tribes do this by deriving their political legitimacy as overlords with religious credentials. As mentioned above, the Ifoghas and above all their traditional leader, the amenokal, for instance, claim direct descent from the Prophet and derive from that fact a measure of their noble status and political legitimacy.[15] In the north, some individuals have been using Islam and emphasizing their personal piety to enhance their own status, or perhaps to legitimize themselves in "respectable" society despite ill-gotten gain from narcotics trafficking—a sort of spiritual money laundering.[16] In this context, the introduction of "reformist" religious trends has added a new dimension to political competition that threatens the old order. For example, for the Peul and Songhay communities of Gao that have embraced radical Islam, their fervor arguably reflects or gives expression to a desire to enhance their position relative to politically superior groups, many of which traditionally have based their legitimacy on religious credentials.

Lastly, inter- and intra-communal competition is both a source of unrest and, at times, a factor that shapes conflict by creating fault lines or fostering alliances. As mentioned above, a close examination of Mali's Tuareg rebellions since 1916 reveals that it is seldom, if ever, the case that all Tuaregs or Arabs make common cause and rebel. On the contrary, Mali's Tuareg rebellions have always been the work of a few specific clans seeking specific objectives. This is likely the case with Arabs as well, although there is considerably less information available about their participation in civil unrest.

Perhaps the most important dynamic to take into consideration is the trend evident since the early 1990s of tradition-ally subordinate groups attempting to raise their stature while traditionally dominant ones strive to preserve their primacy. As mentioned above, personal piety or militancy are two approaches. Another is taking up arms with the expectation of being able to renegotiate one's status vis-à-vis other groups or the state. To give a few examples, in the 1990s militant groups representing subaltern Tuareg clans (including one group commanded by Haji ag Gamou, now the most prominent Tuareg commander in the Malian Army) fought against the Ifoghas, who in turn rallied behind Iyad ag Ghali—who currently commands Ansar Dine, but at the time was the commander of what was essentially an Ifogha militia. Another example is the violent clashes that took place in 2002 in the Gao region between traditionally dominant Kuntas Arabs and traditionally subordinate Arab tribes who wanted, among other things, to stop paying tributary taxes.[17] Control of narcotics trafficking may have been another motivation for these skirmishes, highlighting the connection, in some instances, between trafficking networks and tribal (as well as family) networks. Such clashes were repeated on multiple occasions during the past decade.[18] Those same Arab subordinate tribes are reported to be religiously militant and later formed part of the core of MUJAO.[19]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGING WITH LOCAL ACTORS

For a variety of reasons, any viable solution for northern Mali's political and security problems will have to involve and rely upon local populations. It has become clear over the past decades of conflict that a significant part of the population is reluctant to see a large Malian military presence in the north—and many Malian soldiers and officers are equally reluctant to be sent to what they consider hardship posts. Besides, northern local actors have a better knowledge of the security situation and the terrain than southerners. Non-Malian African troops

The most important dynamic to take into consideration is the trend of traditionally subordinate groups attempting to raise their stature while traditionally dominant ones strive to preserve their primacy.

are not likely to fare better than southern Malians, and French troops, too, have their limitations, among which is the basic fact that they are unlikely to remain in significant numbers for an extended period of time.

Engaging with local actors requires concern for the effects—often unintended—of reaching out to any particular individuals or people. This is true for humanitarian aid as much as it is for military assistance or various forms of security cooperation, for, as we have seen, aid organizations can inadvertently alter political climates. A better understanding of local actors can mitigate the risk. Such knowledge can also create new opportunities for engagement aimed at stabilizing northern Mali.

Historically speaking, outsiders have engaged local actors in northern Mali several times, some more successfully than others. These occurred in different contexts and for different purposes, so they are not presented here as models for action, but rather as a way of identifying opportunities and warning against potential pitfalls in efforts to resolve the current crisis.

French Engagement in Past Conflicts

Colonial France used local knowledge to good effect first in its efforts to conquer and secure northern Mali and set conditions for 44 years of peace. It did this, moreover, with the barest of footprints: At no point did France deploy more than 100 French soldiers at a time to northern Mali.[20] French forces—limited to officers and noncommissioned officers at the head of indigenous infantry and camel-mounted cavalry—relied instead on excellent intelligence and local allies. What France did was forge an alliance with two powerful but vulnerable communities—the Kunta Arabs and the Kel Adagh Tuaregs—that were subordinate to Mali's most powerful Tuareg confederation at the time, the Iwellemmeden.[21] These allies welcomed the opportunity to break their overlords, and they used France's campaign against the Iwellemmeden as a way to elevate their own status.[22] Later, France faced another threat in the form of insurgent Moroccan tribes who challenged the French presence and regularly launched raids into northern Mali. France lacked the means to deal with this threat itself, so it delegated to the Kel Adagh amenokal, Attaher ag Illi (the father of the present amenokal, Intallah ag Attaher), responsibility for securing the region from the Arab raiders.[23] With only a few French officers, Kel Adagh auxiliaries—most of whom were from the elite Ifogha clans—led a campaign against the raiders that ended with a final victory over the Arab tribes in question in 1928.

Afterward, the French commanders duly noted in their reports the Ifoghas' "devotion to our cause."[24]

The alliance with the Kel Adagh under Attaher ag Illi was a boon for France in a number of regards, not least in that it spared France from having to commit more of its own men and resources to the tasks of conquering and securing northern Mali. The Kel Adagh leadership, in turn, used their relationship with the colonial power to solidify their primacy and become the dominant force in all of northern Mali. The key to France's success was the fact that the interests of the Kel Adagh elites—the Ifoghas—aligned with French interests. In this process, however, France was less interested in building a stable political order in northern Mali than in finding the right proxy to assert its own dominance. In doing so, it effectively created and then froze into place a particular political order and social hierarchy, with the Ifoghas at the top of northern Mali's political pyramid. This worked only in so far as subordinate communities were willing to tolerate it, which reflected their degree of politicization, their estimation of both the Ifoghas and the French, and their understanding of where their best interests lay—all of which would evolve after Mali won its independence from France.

Malian Engagement in Past Conflicts

In 1963, shortly after independence, a number of predominantly Ifogha Tuareg clans rebelled against the newly independent Malian government, which put down the rebellion brutally and exacted retribution on Arabs and Tuaregs, notwithstanding the fact that very few in fact participated in the rebellion.[25] The Malian state responded differently to the 1990 rebellion, which unlike the 1963 uprising initially included virtually all of Mali's Tuareg clans as well as Malian Arabs, although their rare show of unity did not last long.[26] Bamako reactivated the old French security arrangement, working this time not with the Kel Adagh amenokal, but with the secular champion of Ifogha primacy, military leader Iyad ag Ghali. Bamako helped Iyad ag Ghali (after Iyad ag Ghali had himself rebelled) defeat rival militias, which were hostile to the Ifoghas and the established clan hierarchies.

This strategy worked in the sense that it helped bring an end to the rebellion and crush the recalcitrant rebel movements, but it also created new problems. First, reasserting Ifogha and Kel Adagh dominance flew in the face of significant trends within Tuareg society that tended to undermine traditional hierarchies and challenged the Ifoghas' status. Mali's Tuaregs

> ## By supporting one individual or group, an outside actor is invariably picking sides, often without fully understanding the dispute that divides them.

had changed, not to speak of their non-Tuareg neighbors. Second, the Ifoghas' interests and certainly Iyad ag Ghali's interests did not align with those of the Malian state, not if one assumes that the Malian government has an interest in securing its legitimacy and sovereignty. The goals of the Ifoghas, on the contrary, have included weakening the Malian state so as to be able to exercise in its place what Trutz von Trotha and Georg Klute have described as "parasovereignty."[27] Iyad ag Ghali, moreover, must be viewed as an entrepreneur anxious to use any advantage to strengthen his own stature, sometimes for the sake of his Iriyaken clan, the Ifoghas, or the Kel Adagh generally, but sometimes for his particular, personal interests. Supporting central government control has never been on his agenda.

When a new rebellion flared up in 2006, Iyad ag Ghali first joined the rebellion—launched as it was by fellow Ifoghas—only to make a separate peace. The conflict was reactivated in 2008 by one faction and only ended a year later when Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré switched clients: Rather than negotiate a deal with the Ifogha-led rebels, Touré dispatched an Arab commander and Haji ag Gamou, a

non-Ifogha Tuareg officer, to launch an offensive against the rebels' stronghold in northeast Mali.[28] Haji ag Gamou in the 1990s was the commander of the militant group that was the most hostile to the Ifoghas and even at one point kidnapped the Ifogha amenokal. Haji ag Gamou's fighters also largely consisted of veterans of his anti-Ifogha militia. As for the rebels, they consisted largely of veterans of Iyad ag Ghali's Ifogha militia, which defeated Haji ag Gamou's militia in the 1990s.[29] President Touré's decision to give the green light to Haji ag Gamou and his men in addition to Arab fighters to settle accounts with their former enemies solved the immediate problem posed by the rebellion but may have created others: Haji ag Gamou currently is the most important Tuareg commander in the Malian military, where he reportedly commands an "army within the army" consisting of fighters from his clan.[30] Ag Gamou's rise has been and remains a source of concern for the Ifoghas, which points to one of the problems of engaging with local actors: By supporting one individual or group, an outside actor is invariably picking sides, often without fully understanding the dispute that divides them.

Ansar Dine leader Iyad ag Ghali (far left) and Malian Colonel-Major Haji ag Gamou (far right) attend a ceremony at Mali's presidential palace on August 19, 2003.

Lessons from Past Engagement

These historical examples suggest that no lasting solution can rely on "picking a winner"—if for no other reason that northern Malians are no longer willing to abide by the kind of dominance exercised during the colonial era by a single clan or confederation—and any solution must be inclusive so as not to worsen tensions between communities. Looking only at the most general level, it is clear that there is already some degree of resentment of the Tuaregs by the other Malian communities, who consider them a "troublemaker" minority and would balk at any settlement that contributes to elevate them to the expenses of other ethnic groups. The Peuls and Songhay must also be engaged, too, particularly given that MUJAO reportedly had popular support among certain Peul and Songhay communities, some of which have radicalized politically and embraced strands of "reformist" Islam.[31] At the subgroup level,

similar concerns arise: The MNLA has offered France its help in fighting Islamist groups,[32] but it is not clear how much the MNLA can hope to gain politically from this support in post-conflict Mali, given doubts about their representativeness and their lack of acceptance among many other communities, who for a large part resent the conditions under which the MNLA occupied northern cities in the spring of 2012. It would also be helpful to know which specific factions are involved in the MNLA at this point, especially since France's potential sponsorship of the MNLA would translate into sponsorship of those factions. If, as analyst Rida Lyammouri contends, the MNLA leadership is essentially Idnan (a non-Ifogha Kel Adagh clan that has demonstrated a strong interest in elevating its own status),[33] working with the MNLA may either antagonize the Ifoghas or, given the amenokal's past vocal support for the MNLA, provide an Ifogha-Idnan rapprochement and a starting point for future political and security arrangements, although other communities would have to be involved as well, both Tuareg and non-Tuareg. Other scholars have indicated that the MNLA's military leadership also includes Tuaregs from the Ifergoumessen and Chemenammas clans. This potentially would give the MNLA a broader support base: Ifergoumessen are Ifogha, while the Chemenammas are commoners who were part of the Iwellemmeden confederation that the French broke apart, with Ifogha help, a century ago and may still be regarded as outside the Kel Adagh.[34] Both, like the Idnan, have a history of conflict with Iyad ag Ghali (the Chemenammas operated their own militia in the 1990s and resisted Ifogha domination) to elevate their status.

This is precisely where a detailed knowledge of the different groups and political dynamics will prove necessary. Key questions include the degree of cohesion of northern communities, their degree of representativeness, their ability to put forward recognized leaders, and their ability to work with others. Knowledge of history plays an important role for that latter point, as past interactions are often a good indicator of the most likely coalitions in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Any solution to the crisis in northern Mali needs to take into account the complexity of the root causes that led to the conflict in the first place. Economic, religious, and political factors played a role in bringing northern Mali to its current situation of extreme vulnerability to extremist groups. If left unaddressed, these issues will prompt a resurgence of the groups that the French and African forces are currently trying to eliminate physically, but who have probably fled already for some part to neighboring countries;[35] moreover, even if those militants were eliminated, others would likely take their place. The international community, including France and the United States, has several means of action at its disposal—development aid and security force assistance being the most common. Alleviating some of the issues that have been plaguing the north for decades now will also require some action from Bamako beyond the feeble implementation of the provisions from previous peace accords. Here, again, the provision of aid and security cooperation may act as a leverage to ensure that development and security objectives are reached in the north. Stronger conditions associated with aid may give all actors (whether in Bamako or elsewhere) an incentive to better distribute these resources to their intended recipients.

The role that inter- and intra-community rivalries have historically played in conflicts in Mali also suggest that even such limited interventions as the provision of aid and security force assistance (as opposed to a full-blown military intervention) require a detailed knowledge of the different local actors and their political dynamics. If the international community wants to keep trying to train indigenous forces that could stand up to Islamist armed groups in the future, it needs to know precisely who should be trained—and what groups may feel excluded or resent the international efforts if they are not properly engaged as well.

Solutions that focus on internal actors need to take into account historical, economic, and social ties to understand the political alignments of today and target those elements that share the same interests as the international community. Only such steps will, in the long term, undercut the temptation of radicalization and offer a chance to break the seemingly never-ending series of rebellions that have plagued northern Mali since its independence. ∎

Notes

[1] MUJAO's leadership includes many foreigners, although most of its rank and file members appear to be indigenous.

[2] Adam Nossiter, Eric Schmitt, and Mark Mazzetti, "French Strikes in Mali Supplant Caution of U.S.," *New York Times*, January 13, 2013, World/Africa section. As of May 2, 2013: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/14/world/africa/french-jets-strike-deep-inside-islamist-held-mali.html

[3] Ronald Wesley Niezen, *Diverse Styles of Islamic Reform Among the Songhay of Eastern Mali*, dissertation, Cambridge University, 1987, pp. 37–38.

[4] A small minority of southerners is Christian or "animist." Jews lived in northern Mali and particularly in Timbuktu as late as the 19th century.

[5] For a full exploration of race and the role of Islam in the construction of racial identities in Mali, see Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[6] *Clan* is the term most commonly used for Tuareg groupings, whereas *tribe* is the term usually applied to Arabs.

[7] Georg Klute, "Die schwerste Arbeit der Welt: Alltag von Tuareg-Nomaden," München, 1992.

[8] For a good discussion of the impact of the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s and why they were so devastating, see Thomas Benetti, "Entwicklung des Verhältnisses zwischen Tuareg und staatlichen Strukturen in Mali," Diplomabeit, Universität Wien, 2008, pp. 59–64, 114–115. As of May 2, 2013: http://othes.univie.ac.at/2030/

[9] Benetti, 2008, pp. 97–101, 106.

[10] Tanguy Berthemet, "Mali: Les rebelles touaregs proclament un état islamiste," *Le Figaro*, May 27, 2012.

[11] According to Oumar Ould Hamaha, MUJAO's leader chief, quoted in Dorothée Thiénot, "Mali: en attendant la guerre," *Le Monde*, October 6, 2012.

[12] Benetti, 2008 p. 96. Benetti cites Georg Klute, "Lokale Akteure der Dezentralisierung im Norden von Mali," in J. Rösel and Trutz von Trotha, eds., *Dezentralisierung, Demokratisierung und die locale Repräsentation des Staates: Theoretische Kontroversen und empirische Forschungen*, Köln: Köppe, 1999, p. 160. Klute, as cited by Benetti, writes about the Kel Adagh's leaders: "They are content with the right of devolution, since with this right they can use their elevated position within the party [ADEMA] to decide on candidates. . . . Simply controlling the unity party seems to be the strategy of tribal leaders."

[13] See, for example, B. F. Soares, "Islam and Public Piety in Mali," in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 205–225; B. F. Soares, "The Prayer Economy in a Malian Town (L'économie de la prière dans une ville malienne)," *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 1996, pp. 739–753.

[14] Michael Shurkin, interview with Charles Grémont, December 11, 2012.

[15] Pierre Boilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh: Dépendances et révoltes—du Soudan français au Mali contemporain*, Paris: Karthala, 1999, pp. 29–30, 53.

[16] Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 96.

[17] Judith Scheele, "Tribus, États et fraude: La région frontalière algéro-malienne," *Études Rurales* 2009/2, No. 184, 2009, p. 86.

[18] Correspondence with Andrew Lebovich, March 2013.

[19] Andy Morgan, "Mali's Tuareg Rebellion," *The Global Dispatches*, March 27, 2012; Chahana Takiou, "Evolution de la situation sécuritaire au Nord: carnage à Aguel-Hoc," *Le 22 Septembre*, January 26, 2012; Michael Shurkin, interview with Wolfram Lacher, December 5, 2012.

[20] According to Boilley (1999, p. 116), in 1913 there were of 21 French officers and 53 French noncommissioned officers in command of 1,019 indigenous soldiers in northern Mali. We regard those numbers as representative of the entire period of conquest and perhaps the entire colonial period; the 1916 rebellion was unlikely to have brought reinforcements to the region given events in Europe at the time.

[21] Boilley, 1999, pp. 64, 95, 96; Charles Grémont, *Tuaregs et Arabes dans les forces armées coloniales et maliennes: une histoire en trompe-l'œil*, Note de l'Ifri, Paris: Ifri, 2010, p. 5.

[22] Georg Klute, "Hostilités et alliances. Archéologie de la dissidence des Touaregs au Mali," *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, Vol. 35, 1995, pp. 64–65.

[23] Boilley, 1999, pp. 101–153.

[24] Boilley, 1999, p. 151.

[25] Benetti, 2008, pp. 57–58; Boilley, 1999, pp. 340–346.

[26] Boilley, 1999, p. 492.

[27] For more on the Ifoghas' efforts to wrest power from the Malian state, see Trutz von Trotha and Georg Klute, "Von der Postkolonie zur Parastaatlichkeit–das Beispiel Schwarzafrika," *Jahrbuch für Internationale Sicherheitspolitik*, 2001, pp. 683–707.

[28] Grémont, 2010, p. 21.

[29] Grémont, 2010, pp. 19–21.

[30] Rémi Carayol, "Mali: Gamou, la revanche dans la peau," *jeuneafrique.com*, March 4, 2013. As of May 2, 2013 : http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2720p030-033.xml0/

[31] Michael Shurkin, interview with Charles Grémont.

[32] "Le MNLA, un nouvel allié pour l'armée française?" *France 24*, January 23, 2013. As of May 2, 2013: http://www.france24.com/fr/20130123-mnla-armee-francaise-mali-negociations-bamako-rebelles-touaregs-islamistes-ansar-dine

[33] Rida Lyammouri, presentation, The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Washington, D.C., March 11, 2013.

[34] Boilley includes the Chemenammas with the Kel Adagh (see figure on p. 4); however, Grémont prefers to describe them as outside the Kel Adagh and, in effect, a remnant of the defunct Iwellemmeden (Michael Shurkin, interview with Charles Grémont).

[35] Jean-Philippe Rémy, "Dans les roches de l'Adrar de Tigharghâr, une bataille cruciale est engagée," *Le Monde*, February 28, 2013.

About This Report

This report draws on research into the causes of the conflict in Mali and the different communities of northern Mali that are involved in it with the purpose of identifying ways to ensure that the current international military intervention there yields enduring results. This research was conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

For more information on the International Security and Defense Policy Center, see http://www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/isdp.html or contact the director (contact information is provided on web page).

www.rand.org